



THE POOR WIDOW.

A

MEMORIAL

OF

MRS. ANNA F. WATERS.

BY A. C. THOMPSON,

PASTOR OF ELIOT CHURCH, ROXBURY.

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THIS word to the rich and poor, touching the sphere of poverty, the measure and motive of giving, illustrated in the case of Mrs. Anna F. Waters, late of the Eliot Church, Roxbury, is published at the request of many friends of the deceased.



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MEMORIAL.

MORE THAN THEY ALL. By what strange arithmetic is this made to appear? It is the estimate of Him who is ever in his holy temple, the spectator of all religious services and charities, under whose searching eyes our subscription papers pass, and through whose hand, as the Great Assayer, our contributions pass.

In that part of the temple called the Court of the Women, stood thirteen brazen vessels, shaped like a trumpet, into which gifts were cast. Christ saw "many that were rich cast in much." Besides coined money, gold and silver vases were sometimes brought as offerings.

“And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.” The coin which she threw in was the smallest known in the land, its value being about one fifth of a cent; hence the whole sum of her contribution was not far from one third of one of our cents. “And Christ called unto him his disciples, and he said, Of a truth I say unto you that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all.”

She gave more relatively to her means. The gauge by which to estimate a contribution is not the amount cast in, but the amount kept back. There lies the test of self-denial; and by that scale she gave not only more than any one else on that occasion, but more than they all together. They of their abundance cast in; she, of her penury; they cast in much; she, her all.

We are also, and chiefly, to suppose a superiority on her part in the character of her motives. It does not appear that vain glory or any selfish consideration influenced

the poor widow. Her act was a cheerful one ; she did not go gloomily away ; and not, as it would seem, till she had passed along and out of hearing did Christ call attention to her. She did not retire with an eye lingering behind to catch the admiring looks of spectators at the treasury.

Humility always accompanies religious self-sacrifice ; while vanity makes the greatest gifts valueless, and ostentation turns coin counterfeit. It is the heart which determines the worth of contributions in the eye of Him by whom actions are weighed. "Holiness to the Lord" being written on those two mites, made them outweigh piles of unsanctified gold. Mysterious, alarming action that in the balances of the sanctuary !

The poverty of the widow in the temple did not exempt her from the duty of giving for religious purposes. We do not find that class excepted in the general requirements of God's word. Rare indeed must be the case of indigence so extreme as

to afford no opportunity for earning, or, by self-denial, saving, what may serve as a lawful offering to the amount, at least, of one third of a cent. The precepts of holy writ, the sanction of our Lord, and the commended example of Macedonian Christians, shew it to be the need, the duty, and the privilege of such no less than of others to bear a part in this blessed work.

True, in order to acceptance, there must, in the gifts of such, as of others, be the elements of cheerfulness and pious obedience; but, "If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not." More frequently, as we fear, are the poor too proud to give only a little, than the rich are too selfish to give much. It requires a good deal of grace, a good deal of moral courage, to put down one's name, from necessity, for a very small amount, after a name with a large amount;

for it is an advertisement of one's indigence, and that is mortifying.

But the watchful eye of Christ is especially upon the poor of his flock, not merely in compassion, but with the scrutiny of a judge. Fidelity, and as much fidelity, is demanded of him who has one talent as of him who has ten. And not only is it the duty, it is the privilege of the poor to practice this virtue. Was the happiness of beneficence designed for others only? May the rich monopolize the joyful reality that the liberal soul shall be made fat? Who has the right to shut himself, or any of Christ's poor, out from that rich field of experience that it is more blessed to give than to receive?

It should never be overlooked that the religious poor often have great spiritual worth and treasures of sanctifying influence.

At the mention of influence, especially female influence, a purely secular mind will recur at once to the attractions of dress

and manners, to beauty of form and features, "the artillery of the eye," and manifold artifices of such as are covetous of admiration, and ingenious in winning it; but at the mention of the poor widow we conceive the rather of the absence of all these. It was the presence of high worth that attracted the Savior's notice, and has given to her so wide a celebrity. It is not intimated that her two mites, in themselves so inconsiderable, were yet altogether insignificant. Let all in our churches, belonging to the same class, give in the same proportion, and the Lord's treasury would be perpetually replenished.

It is a great mistake to despise the day of small things, or the saint of small means. The many mites make the mountain, and mere drops the ocean. While then we accord to munificent charities their fullest claims; while we love to see the Viscountess Glenorchy erecting houses of worship, expending by hundreds of pounds

to relieve indigence, and to place deserving families in situations of comfort and usefulness, and bequeathing ample sums to educate young men for the ministry, and to propagate Christianity; while we bestow like admiration upon Lady Huntingdon, for a yet more impressive consecration to the support and diffusion of the gospel, persevered in with the ardor of her ever-expanding benevolence to beyond four score years; we remember also that the opulent are comparatively few; that the ability to make such splendid donations is so rare as to be accounted exceptional; and that it is within the reach of the humblest to give "more than they all."

Religious influence is measured by quite another scale than that of one's charities. It is determined by one's rank — rank of character — by nobility in the spiritual world.

And what is it that makes one truly great, that gives a mastery, not factitious

and transient, but real and lasting, over the minds of men ?

The person of true greatness is the one who has great ends in view, those which God pronounces such ; the one who cherishes elevated motives, whose mind, be it well or ill stored, be it limited or wide in its range, is allied by its aims and sympathies, to the mind and kingdom of Jesus Christ, and hence to all that is grand, to all that is excellent in the universe. Such an one, having little or much, belonging to the humbler or higher classes, always holds an elevated position ; is always in office ; on the standard of angelic estimates, belongs to the aristocracy ; is of the seed royal. Religious worth is superior to circumstances ; is mightier than all the accidents of social rank, of talents and property. Hence the two mites of a godly woman will outweigh two mountains of the worldly man's gold. Warmed by the hand of

glowing benevolence, they shall raise the average temperature of a selfish world. Such poor, — the self-denying, praying poor, rich in faith, — constitute the church's wealth. Not more wonderful was it that the company of five thousand should have been fed with the five loaves and two fishes, than that so many thousands should have been quickened and swayed by that woman's two mites.

Here, too, is lasting influence. The individual thus presented to us is a woman, — not a princess or an heiress, but one of the humblest and poorest; a widow, an oriental widow, experiencing trials in that state unknown amongst us; yet that obscure individual, by her act of religious self-denial, established through Christ a position whose power is felt after this long interval as that of no secular female of antiquity. How many thousands throughout the last eighteen centuries have been rebuked and

stimulated by her example! What a revenue of influence from those two mites! Cast their compound interest; find the value accumulated through these two thousand years past; what figures can express it?

“There came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing!” O, famous farthing! How hast thou swelled into riches greater than Cræsus’! Thou wast the seed of things, and has brought forth an hundred fold!

“A certain poor widow cast in two mites.” O, memorable bits of brass! your ring is still heard, clear and strong; and thus will it sound on to the end of time; and at the last day will ye be seen transmuted into gold, yea, into something richer than gold; ye shall be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ!

And to whom was it that our Savior called the attention of his disciples? To one of that throng who had been bred in

affluence ? to one clothed in purple and fine linen, moving leisurely through the temple court, with grace and dignity like a princess ? No ; it was to one whose name even is not recorded ; whose only title was *poor* ; whose biography is summed up in this, “A certain poor widow.” Little did she dream of the notice taken of her act, and the use to be made of it ; never, probably, did she know, while on earth, that any save the All-seeing eye marked the transaction ; yet, all unconsciously, was she then crowned a queen ; and her character has come down the track of ages invested with more than regal splendor.

Of the female names ranking high in the secular records of ancient times, no one eclipses Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi. Such was her character that Ptolemy, king of Egypt, paid his addresses to her, though unsuccessfully. All the kings in alliance with Rome expressed their appreciation of her excellence and

her position, by sending presents, and receiving the like courtesies in return. But hers was far from being the worth, or now the world-wide celebrity, of "a certain poor widow, who cast into the treasury two mites, which make a farthing." The time will come when the present queen of England, with all her worth, and all her wealth and power, will be seldom mentioned and little thought of, compared with this "poor widow," the record of whom, translated into every language, will touch the hearts of millions yet unborn. Hers is a sway mightier than the loftiest throne ever erected.

The Lord himself has pronounced, "Them that honor — her that honoreth — me, I will honor." It is not position that makes one honorable or otherwise. It is not superior talent which commands the most enduring and heartfelt admiration of mankind. Madame de Stael cannot maintain her supremacy beside the poor widow of our text. "History is busy with us,"

said the unfortunate Marie Antoinette ; but her fame belongs not to a kingdom so wide as that of the heroine we now contemplate. This poor widow we always have with us. She comes to our door with every worthy applicant for charities ; she passes noiselessly before us amidst our contributions in the sanctuary. She has been doing good every day since the Savior spoke approvingly of her. She lives, and to the end of time will live, animating the pious poor, rebuking the selfishly rich, and by her presence quickening the general pulse of beneficence. Not those who seek for self, but those who do great things for Christ, are the truly great ; and there are none too poor or too obscure to exhibit all that is attractive and sublime in self-sacrifice. "There is more excellency," remarks Luther, "in the duties of a plain rustic Christian than in the exploits of Cæsar or Alexander." It is the troop of little and am-

bitious souls who crave notoriety. Real grandeur and enduring renown, pertain only to the self-forgetful, — to those who seek not the praise of men, but of God. They, though the lowest of the low,

“Placed beneath envy — above envy rise;
Pity great men — great things despise.”

“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble *are called* :

“But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ;

“And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are :

“That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

All this is plainly true now ; but how much more so will it be at the day of death, and the day of final disclosures. Then will the righteous, — the righteous poor, — shine forth as the brightness of the firmament. Then will the littleness of earthly and outward distinctions, and the incomparable worth of spiritual excellence, be seen in their broad, their infinite contrast.

A pastor was one day visiting a female believer, more than seventy years of age, whose last days were spent in a poor house. Conversing with her on the comforts and rewards of piety, he observed an unusual lustre beaming from her countenance, and the calmness of Christian triumph glistening in her eye. “Will you tell me,” said he, “what thought it was that passed through your mind, which was the cause of your appearing so joyful?” She replied: “Oh, sir, I was just thinking what a great change it will be from the Poor House to Heaven!” The

most amply furnished mansion, the most magnificent palace, yea earth, with all her treasures, is but an alms-house to the place which Christ has gone to prepare for his disciples; and where he is daily receiving them, more numerous by far from beds of straw than from beds of down. "It came to pass that the beggar also died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom."

Mrs. Waters was not indeed a beggar; but she was a poor widow, a childless widow; she left no relatives residing amongst us; and there was nothing in her position to create an apparent claim for a public notice in this manner; but because of the absence of everything likely to bring motives into question, and because Christ, sitting over against the treasury, calls to his disciples, and saith unto them, "Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all," therefore we make mention of her.

What the place, or date of her birth were, what her maiden name was, we hardly know. Respecting her early circumstances we have asked not a question. The most that we know, or need to know is, that for the last sixteen years she was a consistent and beloved member of the Eliot Church — that her public profession of faith in Christ was made at fifteen years of age, and that she lived one year beyond three score and ten.

But go to her recent home. Enter that least attractive dwelling occupied by any member of the congregation to which she belonged, particularly in its condition during the first years of her residence among us. You are at once impressed with the evidence of deepest poverty, of her own circumscribed knowledge, the feebleness of her intellect, and the absence of all personal attractions; but every repeated interview will bring out new developments, and will cause you not a little surprise

that divine grace should so enlarge and elevate a mind otherwise wholly unattractive. Her command of language you will find remarkable, especially in prayer — such is the testimony of those with whom she used to join — there being often such enlargement of heart and flow of words as to awaken wonder.

Her religion, however, was not talked out, or talked about, so much as exemplified, and that through an ardent love to the Savior, and a most affectionate interest in the church of Christ, and the extension of his kingdom. Yet when she did speak upon religious themes, it was with great naturalness and cheerfulness, as of things most familiar and dearest to her.

A transparent simplicity characterised her. In asking a question, or giving an answer; in expressing an opinion, in the commonest remarks, there was a strait-forward frankness, without the least appearance of affected self distrust. When she uttered thanks, or professed love either to a

Christian friend or to her Savior, it was seen to be the prompting of a guileless, sanctified heart. While many persons express more than they feel so evidently as to repel you, it always seemed as if her words, intense though they were, did not tell the half there was in her heart. She was not weakly abashed by the presence of superiors, for hers was a "hope that maketh not ashamed;" and if those occupying a social or other position higher than hers were only friends to her best Friend, Christian love to them swallowed up every other consideration. It seemed as if her heart had been emptied of all else, and filled with love to her Redeemer; which attachment to him extended to all that is his, for his sake. Christ was her life, was in her the hope of glory; hence you never found her sad, or melancholy, or complaining; never apologizing for anything about herself or her house; but always cheerful, always rejoicing in the Lord. Yet were her expressions of un-

worthiness frequent and varied, indicative of an unfeigned sense of remaining sin, and need of atoning blood.

All that was wanting to make her the warm friend of those around, was for them to manifest attachment to Christ; and all that was needful to become her benefactor, was to give her opportunity to express her affection and to show a favor. With what a gush of childlike delight would she welcome Christian friends! and who that ever witnessed it, did not value and admire it a thousand fold beyond the conventional dignity and elaborate graces of the most faultless etiquette! Such a person would of course be a peace-maker. She could not help — who that loves Christ can help? — being pained at heart-burnings and envyings among Christ's followers; and in her guileless way, she did not a little to smoothe away those feelings of neglect which too often find expression in our churches; and she would occasionally bring marked

delicacy and tact to the work of removing the occasions of such feelings.

What her ideas of social intercourse with Christian friends were, was illustrated in a visit at her house last autumn. Ten or fifteen persons were invited to tea. After tea, she remarked that she did not expect to live a great while; that she was looking forward to heaven as her home; that God had been very kind to her; and said she, "I want you all to praise the Lord with me for his goodness." She had selected a few pages relating to a Christian's anticipations of heaven, which she requested to have read; and had also turned down a leaf to the hymn —

"Come let us join our friends above,"

— which was sung, and then prayer was offered. Afterwards with much modesty she brought out a few grapes which had

been sent to her, and of which she hoped they would all eat, as she wanted them to have a pleasant visit. And clusters of Eschol they were, for the atmosphere of heaven was there, and all felt themselves refreshed by foretastes of the promised land.

Mrs. Waters' piety was of the active kind. She went about doing good. She seemed to have but little activity of mind except in devising and improving methods of usefulness. In her quiet way she devised liberal things, and many a good result in the church to which she belonged came from a secret spring touched by her gentle hand, and thought out in her humble abode. Yet in all these endeavors, and in her whole conversation, you witnessed no loss of humility of spirit. Her desires for the general increase of spirituality, and the prosperity of Zion, impelled her to make calls where, on other errands, there might have been apparent intrusion. Two or

three years since, she made a wearisome effort to see a Christian friend, and asked if there were not some way in which the hearts of the sisters of the church could be warmed toward each other. "I don't know," said she, "what can be done, but I thought if a few could come together at a time, and have a sort of Inquiry Meeting, and talk about the Savior, and pray together, perhaps it would do us all good." From that time a weekly prayer meeting was usually held at her house. She was an efficient volunteer colporteur in the distribution of tracts and religious books. The sick and the needy were sure to have her sympathies, and often something more than sympathy. More than one of Christ's ministering servants have been made acquainted with her thoughtful Christian regards. Knitting was her chief occupation, and the results of her prayerful industry have gone far and wide. Never were her pastor's feet

otherwise so effectually “shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;” while the same have rendered more beautiful the feet of one at least that published peace on the mountains of Syria and along the banks of the Tigris.

Her benevolence was remarkable. It was cheerful, habitual, indefatigable. It was also systematic. At the time of her greatest depression as to worldly circumstances, she would, when unable to attend the monthly concert, secretly contribute sometimes a dollar, casting in all she had at the time; yes, “all her living,” into the treasury of the Lord for Foreign Missions. Yet never, I believe, did the contribution box for other objects pass without receiving two mites at least. Frequently, too, would she take a long walk to hand a donation to some one in whom she had confidence, saying, “I don’t want any body to know it.” Never did she make her necessary absence, through sickness or infirmity, from the

place of contribution, an excuse for withholding her contribution. She gave from principle, and her gift was sure to find its way soon to the destined object. Does any one ask how she obtained the means of giving so much? It was through industry, and a most self-denying economy. And then she was the poor widow who gave "all that she had."

Never shall I forget a morning call from her during the period of her former and extreme indigence, when her situation was worse than that of widowhood. She brought a basket of cents, the mites which for a year she had been casting in, as the fruits of self-denial, over and above her ordinary gifts. She had heard something from the pulpit in regard to the denial of self out of love to Christ, and to promote his cause, and her aim was, by this method to save two cents a week to help on the good work of

missions. She wished me to count the contents, and see if there were enough to make the average for all the weeks of the year, — a calculation too deep for her — and when I told her there was that amount and three cents over, how did the anxiety of her countenance pass away, and devout joy beam from every feature !

She cast in all that she had. And during later years of comparative worldly comfort, in addition to her contributions to other objects, and in addition to her annual and monthly gifts to Foreign Missions, she has repeatedly placed in my hand a bit of old newspaper containing ten or fifteen dollars for the same object. While then there are those in the congregation who give to the cause just named, by fifties, by hundreds, yes, by a thousand or more dollars annually, “Of a truth I say unto you, this poor widow hath cast in more than they all. For all these have of their abundance

cast in unto the offerings of God ; but she of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had."

But after much of previous illness and feebleness, the final sickness came at length. It lasted five weeks ; yet did any one in all her sickness hear a word of complaint ? No ; nor witness a look that indicated anything but submission to God. Her extreme difficulty of speech cut her off, for the most part, from communication with friends, except by the mute language of signs. She was perfectly tranquil ; not a cloud seemed to intervene between her soul and her Savior. Resignation was complete. "Death or life—the will of the Lord be done !" was her frequent whisper. When the promises appropriate to her case were recited, she would nod assent, and point upward ; or when she had the power of utterance, would respond, "O, yes, yes !" If an allusion were made to her views and prospects, she would stretch her emaciated

arms at full length heavenward, and look up with a most expressive smile. The repetition of such favorite hymns as,

“ Oh, could I speak the matchless worth,
Oh, could I sound the glories forth,
Which in my Savior shine,”

would fire her soul with exulting joy. Being unable to express her feelings in any other way, she would clasp and shake my hand with a complete ecstasy of delight. Being informed at one time that several had sent love to her, and many were constantly inquiring for her, she slowly raised her arm as high as she could reach, and pointing upwards said, “ *God* is good.” When told that she was affectionately remembered in prayer at the church meeting the night before, she smiled gratefully, and gently clapped her hands in token of Christian delight.

To a young friend she remarked, “ The Lord bless you and keep you, and guide you all the way you ought to go. As

for me, I shan't be here long ; but there's something better laid up — laid up — laid up —" repeating the words each time more faintly, yet more emphatically. No wonder that those who watched with her by night should pronounce her room "a little heaven."

Her last act of charity in sickness was to send a dollar to a city missionary in New York, as her last labor before sickness was to knit a pair of socks for the same individual.

But the hour of her departure drew on ; and God made her peace like a river, and her joy unspeakable. "Triumph over death!" "Triumph over death!" was often on her lips. Great as was her difficulty of articulation, she could not be hindered from uttering, "I long to be with Jesus!" "I mount ; I fly." Her parting words to myself were, "I expect to stay in heaven to-night." The last words heard by those who tarried at her bedside were, "Home — almost

home; I'm almost there!" And presently she was quite there; there where her Savior is; there where, too, is "a certain poor widow who, of old, cast into the treasury two mites, which make a farthing."

"Stranger! how great soe'er,
With lowly reverence bow!
There's one in that poor shed,
One by that wretched bed,
Greater than thou.

"That pavement damp and cold,
No whispering courtiers tread.
One silent woman stands
Chafing with pale, thin hands,
A dying head.

"O change! O wondrous change!
Burst are the prison bars!
This moment there — so low
In mortal prayer — and now
Beyond the stars!"

"Home — almost home; I'm almost there!" And there she now is; there she now walks in a radiant beauty

such as beams from no comely countenance here ; and that bent, shrivelled form, that wrinkled face of hers, will ere long come forth from the grave, fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body. Did ever ministering angels bear an emancipated soul with more alacrity to the paradise of God ? Will it be only a common joy to her Christian friends, only a common joy to the five or more ministers of our Lord who visited her in her last sickness, to meet her in the palace of the great King ? "The righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance."

It has been my privilege — if privilege it should be called — to visit European galleries of art, and palaces of kings and princes ; to gaze in admiration at lofty arching roofs, to stand entranced before master pieces of art, and to look with wondering eye at articles of vertu ; yet with no such feelings of deep and lasting pleasure, as at

the rude home of this departed sister and friend. Down that narrow alley, and in its former hovel-like condition, that dwelling, unplastered, and proportionately destitute in other respects, the rafters deeply incrustated with soot, a rough box and rickety stove its chief ornaments, was a place where dwelt a daughter of the King. Beyond all question we had a princess among us. There was a vase moulded into peerless beauty. There was a gem of unsurpassed brilliancy — the Koh-i-nor of our regalia. That dim apartment was an assembly room of saints, a reception hall of Christ's ambassadors, and for any who have been made kings and priests unto God. Glowing love to Christ make that dark room luminous. Angels gazed and lingered there.

Oh, what wealth there may be amidst the deepest poverty; what poverty of excellence amidst the amplest treasures!

